



Making the links: Do we connect climate change with health? A qualitative case study from Canada

Author(s): Cardwell FS, Elliott SJ
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Abstract:

BACKGROUND: Climate change has been described as the biggest global health threat of the 21st century. Typically framed as an environmental issue, some suggest this view has contributed to public ambivalence and hence a lack of public engagement. The lack of understanding of climate change as a significant environmental health risk on the part of the lay public represents a significant barrier to behaviour change. We therefore need to think about reframing the impact of climate change from an environmental to a health issue. This paper builds on calls for increased understanding of the public's views of human health risks associated with climate change, focusing on facilitators and barriers to behaviour change. **METHODS:** Semi-structured in-depth interviews (n Euro Surveillance (Bulletin European Sur Les Maladies Transmissibles; European Communicable Disease Bulletin) 22) with residents of the Golden Horseshoe region of Southern Ontario were conducted between August 2010 and January 2011. Topics included individual and community health, climate change, and facilitators and barriers to behaviour change. **RESULTS:** Few participants recognized the role of the environment in the context of either individual and community health. When asked about health concerns specific to their community, however, environmental issues were mentioned frequently. Health effects as possible impacts of global environmental change were mentioned by 77% of participants when prompted, but this link was not described in great detail or within the context of impacting their communities or themselves. Participants were willing to act in environmentally friendly ways, and possible incentives to undertake behaviour change such as decreasing cost were described. Health co-benefits were not identified as incentives to engaging in mitigative or adaptive behaviours. **CONCLUSIONS:** The results support recent calls for reframing the impact of climate change from an environmental to a public health issue in order to increase public engagement in adaptive and mitigative behaviour change. While previous research has touched on public awareness of the human health risks of climate change, we have further explored the attitude-action link through the examination of facilitators and barriers to behaviour change.

Source: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3608965>

Resource Description

Communication:

resource focus on research or methods on how to communicate or frame issues on climate change; surveys of attitudes, knowledge, beliefs about climate change

A focus of content

Climate Change and Human Health Literature Portal

Communication Audience: ☒

audience to whom the resource is directed

Public

Exposure : ☒

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Unspecified Exposure

Geographic Feature: ☒

resource focuses on specific type of geography

None or Unspecified

Geographic Location: ☒

resource focuses on specific location

Non-United States

Non-United States: Non-U.S. North America

Health Co-Benefit/Co-Harm (Adaption/Mitigation): ☒

specification of beneficial or harmful impacts to health resulting from efforts to reduce or cope with greenhouse gases

A focus of content

Health Impact: ☒

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

General Health Impact

Mitigation/Adaptation: ☒

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Mitigation

Resource Type: ☒

format or standard characteristic of resource

Research Article

Timescale: ☒

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified